

BGS Discovery Metadata

Exploring, collecting and managing data in a user-friendly format

by Jeremy Giles, *Keyworth*

The BGS has been collecting and managing information since it was founded in 1835. Many individual records predate the formation of the BGS. For example the Borehole Records Collection contains a description dating from the 1920s of a Roman well, whilst the oldest core run comes from the Portsmouth Dockyard Borehole of 1825. The BGS has numerous other collections and data-sets that have been carefully husbanded over the centuries for the benefit of the nation. However, the problem has been that the nation was largely unaware of these rich information sources. The BGS is not alone in this problem as many other organisations are also recognising that their information assets are not being fully exploited.

The now widely-recognised solution to the problem is the compilation of metadata for each of the data-sets within an organisation. A simplistic definition of metadata is that it is 'data about data'. In effect, it is a mechanism of describing and documenting data so that a potential user can ensure that it is fit for the purpose for which it is intended. The highest level of metadata is Discovery Metadata. Its purpose, as implied by the name, is to facilitate the discovery of the wealth of information

available in the underlying data. It describes the whole data-set as a single entity.

By its nature, Discovery Metadata is intended to be made public and shared so that it can be searched by as wide a group of potential users as possible. But effective sharing requires standards to ensure a minimum level of content is provided that may be understood by all users. As a member of the National Geospatial Data Framework (NGDF), the BGS has been actively involved in the development of a National Discovery Metadata standard. This is available for free download from:

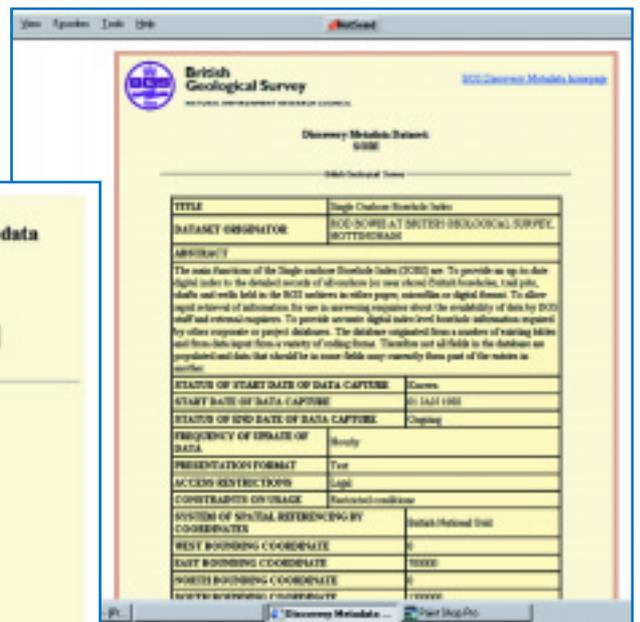
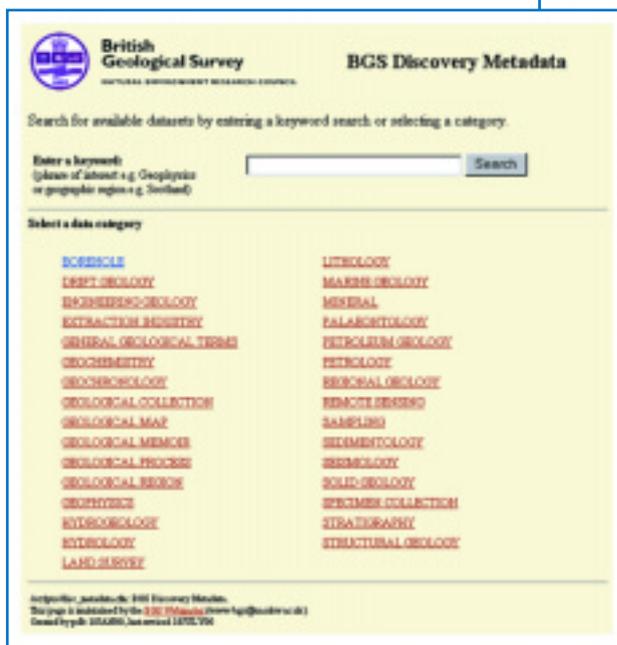
www.ngdf.org.uk/metadata/met_guid.htm. This standard will, in time, be merged with the Standard for Metadata set by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), which is currently in draft form.

The BGS has now documented nearly three hundred data-sets to the NDGF Discovery Metadata standard. Details of these, accessible by a searchable interface, are available at: www.bgs.ac.uk/discoverymetadata/home.htm

The BGS has also taken an active part in developing the NGDF Data Locator available at: www.askgiraffe.com. This site links to the same information as available on the BGS site but is available in the 'open market' with numerous other significant data-sets. The NGDF Data Locator also offers a wide range of search options including a simple map interface.

For more information on Discovery Metadata, contact:

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Above: An example of output from a Discovery Metadata search.

Left: The BGS Discovery Metadata Search screen.